DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 322 CS 215 304

AUTHOR Daniels, Patricia A.
TITLE A Case Study: The Meaning and Use of Portfolios in the Classroom of a More Conservative (Curriculum Oriented) Teacher.
PUB DATE 29 Nov 95
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (45th, New Orleans, LA, November 29-December 2, 1995).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Classroom Research; Cooperative Learning; Grade 5; Intermediate Grades; *Portfolio Assessment; Portfolios (Background Materials); Revision (Written Composition); State Standards; *Student Evaluation; *Teaching Styles; Writing (Composition); *Writing Evaluation; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Vermont

ABSTRACT

A case study examined how one elementary school teacher negotiated her response to VAP (Vermont Assessment Program), Vermont's requirement for a portfolio assessment. Two questions guided the study: (1) how does one fifth-grade teacher use portfolios in classroom writing assessment and instruction? and (2) to what extent do portfolios, as mandated by VAP, inform or influence a teacher's classroom instruction and assessment practices during the first year of implementation? The study spanned a 10-month period, from August 1994 to June 1995. Data consisted of a case book of observational material and documents surrounding these observations, along with extensive interviews. The teacher's initial response to VAP was first fear and then relief, as she determined it was "nothing new." A class writing period characterizes all those observed: they do not extend beyond 45 minutes; students are assigned topics; there is no peer conferencing; brief, positive feedback is given by the teacher; and all finished writing is carefully collected for the VAP portfolio. To prepare the five required VAP portfolios for submission to the state the teacher worked with chosen students individually; then, all the other students prepared their portfolios. The teacher now realizes these two processes should have been reversed. Results suggest that there were some significant changes in the classroom; for example, students wrote more often than before. (An appendix shows a typical writing period in the classroom.) (TB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 395 322

A Case Study:

The Meaning and Use of Portfolios In the Classroom of a More Conservative (Curriculum-Oriented) Teacher

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P Daniels
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Patricia A, Daniels
534-B Waterman Building
University of Vermont
Burlington, Vermont 05405-0160

pdaniels@moose.uvm.edu

Research funded by a grant from the Spencer Foundation

Paper presented at the 45th Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, November 29, 1995 New Orleans, Louisiana

CS215304

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Vermont: "The Portfolio State"

When Dr. Lee Shulman from Stanford University addressed a gathering of Vermont educators in 1992, his opening words resonated:

> I have entered a land of portfolios. Your Vermont license plates could say 'The Portfolio State' instead of 'The Green Mountain State!"

I agree. During the most recent five of my twenty years as a Vermont classroom teacher, parent, teacher educator and educational researcher, my life has become as enveloped by "portfolios" as it is by Vermont's illustrious green mountains.

It was not always this way. Until 1991, Vermont had no regular statewide assessment program. From 1988 to 1991, in response to a legislative prod for a statewide student assessment system, leaders from the Department of Education, classroom teachers, other educators, and lay people gathered to develop the state's approach. Essentially, they decided that traditional standardized tests do not provide the kind of information the state needs about what students know and can do, and do not push student learning in the direction educators believe it should go. Using extensive teacher input, Vermonters created and piloted their own alternative system. During the 1991-1992 school year, Vermont became the first state in the nation to implement a revolutionary statewide portfolio-based assessment program (Hewitt, 1993). The Vermont Assessment Program (VAP) placed Vermont on the cutting edge of reform in large scale assessment.

Vermont sets a unique context for such educational reform. It is one of the most rural states in the country. Its size (9,614 square miles) is comparable to that of a large county in most of our larger states. It has a total population

of only about 563,00 people in the latest census, and a total K-12 public school population of less than 100,000 students, divided unevenly among 60 supervisory unions. Most of its elementary schools are small and rural; over 50% have only one classroom of each grade level, and multi-aged groupings are common. Vermont schools have a long tradition that values local governance, teacher autonomy and full inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms.

The VAP Writing Assessment

How are Vermont students assessed? There are two required components of the VAP in both math and writing: a "uniform test" and portfolios of student work. This study focuses on the portfolio component for writing. Ideally, writing is collected by all fifth and eighth grade students throughout the school year and set aside in a working folder or portfolio as possible pieces for the VAP portfolio. In May, the Department of Education requests a randomly-selected sample of portfolios from each supervisory union to be sent to a central location and scored by teams of teachers. These writing portfolios are structured to contain six various types of writing from that academic year, including a student-selected "best piece" which they feel represents their best work as a writer, and a written reflection letter on their reasons for choosing that piece. Teacher/scorers apply a 4-point rubric (extensively, frequently, sometimes, rarely) along five dimensions (purpose, organization, details, voice/tone, grammar/usage/mechanics) against specific performance criteria. The criteria were formulated and revised over time by groups of Vermont teachers (Hewitt, 1993). (In contrast, the Uniform Test of Writing is a direct writing assessment using a single prompt that is administered to and collected from all Vermont students in grades five and

eight in May, and scored by an outside agency using the same criteria as used with the portfolios.)

From 1991-1994, the VAP was implemented in fourth and eighth grade classrooms in both mathematics and writing. In September, 1995, the writing assessment previously done in fourth grade was moved to fifth grade. The Department of Education's decision to shift statewide writing assessment to fifth grade was in response to concerns raised by fourth grade teachers and school administrators about the difficulty fourth grade teachers were having implementing both writing and math portfolios within the same classroom. Another less-often-stated rationale was to promote change in the instruction and assessment of writing at grades other than four and eight.

As I continue to learn about the VAP, I realize that Vermont's teachers are its lifeblood. In partnership with Department of Education specialists, teachers initially developed and piloted the VAP system. Within that system, they remain indispensable: teachers are network leaders whose role it is to facilitate, support and inform their colleagues during the process; teachers score portfolios that are sent to the state; teachers must do portfolios with their students; teachers are the decision-makers about how it will be done. It is imperative to listen to what they say about the VAP and to investigate their experiences because

> The real challenge to the process of the portfolio system will be the support of teachers. If teachers feel it is just another directive from above, I doubt that the amount of attention needed to create and maintain a portfolio system will ever be achieved. (Abruscato, 1993, p. 477)

Dr. Abruscato's words succinctly underscore the rationale for this study: an understanding of real teachers in real classrooms implementing portfolios

will enable policy makers to better understand and respond to the experiences and perspectives of teachers (Stake, 1993). And without teachers, the VAP cannot endure.

"This Is My Way": The Meaning and Use of Portfolios in the Classroom of a More Conservative Teacher (Curriculum-Oriented Approach)

This is a case study of Maura Lincoln, an experienced Vermont fifth grade teacher, and how she negotiates her response to the VAP mandate as a first year implementer. Two sub-questions guide my inquiry: (1) How does one fifth grade teacher use portfolios in classroom writing assessment and instruction? (2) To what extent do portfolios, as mandated by the VAP, inform or influence her classroom instruction and assessment practices during her first year of implementation? My paper is structured in five sections. First, I describe my research methodology and the context of the study. Next, I introduce Maura Lincoln through some of her own words and my observations of her. At the heart of the study are descriptions and discussions of two events central to the research questions: a "typical" writing period, and the process of VAP portfolio construction in Mrs. Lincoln's classroom. In conclusion, I discuss this case study as a window on the nature of the influence of the Vermont Assessment Program on classroom instruction and assessment.

Methodology

This study spans a ten month period, from August, 1994, to June, 1995, during which a rich collection of observational, interview and document data was aggregated.

Observational data. I have compiled a "case book" of observational data, which includes detailed "running records" of eight days of observations in Mrs. Lincoln's fifth grade classroom (four two-day observations, spaced evenly throughout the year, during the months of November, January, April, and May). Also included are the documents that surround these observations and/or describe the contexts for each visit: summaries of reactions/ highlights from each visit, examples of representative student work and copies of the state portfolios constructed in her classroom. During the classroom observations, Maura wore a wireless microphone. Extended portions of relevant dialogue from these visits have been transcribed.

Observational data collected from other relevant events in which Maura participated add information about possible influences on her instruction and assessment practices: (1) a two day state-sponsored workshop in August, provided for the purpose of helping fifth grade teachers get started with portfolios, (2) a March network meeting, and (3) a fifth grade teacher meeting in May in which VAP portfolios were scored. In a field log, I kept a running record during all observations, which I used to reconstruct the experiences in detail.

Interviews. Extensive pre- and post-interviews were conducted and transcribed. These interviews focused on Maura's classroom instructional and assessment practices, her use of portfolios, and her perceptions of the VAP. In addition, brief interviews were conducted before and after each two-day observation to clarify what was observed and to gain Maura's impressions of how her days went. Embedded within each observation were instances of impromptu, informal, sometimes anecdotal conversations which I termed as "Teacher Talk." Some "Teacher Talk" was taped and transcribed verbatim, and other episodes were reconstructed as accurately and in as much detail as

possible from field notes. These conversations were initiated by Maura and dealt with matters and issues she felt were significant.

Additional interviews were conducted with the school principal, a fourth grade teacher in the same school, and the area network leader, to create a broader local context for understanding direct and indirect influences on Mrs. Lincoln's assessment and instruction practices.

Data analysis. Once the transcribed interviews, observational field notes and documents were arranged in chronological order in a "case book," the next phase of analysis involved the identification, coding and categorization of primary patterns in the data, using a content analysis procedure (Ely, 1991; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990). In doing so, I triangulated data sources. Interview data were examined for consistency with direct observations, and documents were analyzed for additional insights into the characterization of assessment and instructional practices I had observed.

Frequent team meetings with five researchers conducting similar case studies at 11 other sites provided an opportunity to discuss emerging trends, affirm perceptions, and develop interpretations. In this way, the potential for bias that might arise from a single perspective was minimized.

Context

The school. Vermont School #07 houses over 800 students in grades K-8 and has two principals: one for grades K-4 and one for grades 5-8. Not only is it one of Vermont's largest elementary schools, it also has a uniquely varied student population, reflecting the broad span of socio-economic classes within the community.

It is a modern-looking, well-maintained and expansive two-story brick structure flanked by an inviting playground, and located in a quiet neighborhood across the railroad tracks from downtown. There are several

teachers for each grade level--grade 5 has five separate fifth grade classrooms. In the 1980's, the school board adopted the "Mastery Learning" approach and all faculty and staff were trained to use it. Although it is still the school's written philosophy, teachers say that now it is seldom reflected in classroom practice.

The classroom. Each time I approached the entrance to Maura's classroom, I was drawn to the student work, always carefully displayed on the long wall before the door. While most displays within the classroom remained unchanged throughout the year, the hallway exhibit changed frequently...from book reports, to science projects, to stories with illustrations. This wall was a source of pride for Maura, who noted that

> There are always people walking by my room, peeking in and saying, "I like your book reports," and they'll go on their way. I think that's what keeps me going...

Inside, the first thing to meet the eye is a set of three large, yellowed teacher-made posters suspended from the ceiling above the center of the room. A single boldly-capitalized word at the top of each poster conveys traits she hopes her students will learn: RESPONSIBILITY -COOPERATION - ACKNOWLEDGMENT. The carpeted room is large and uncrowded with desks arranged in the middle--sometimes in rows, sometimes in clusters of 2 to 4. Two long rectangular tables used for small group work and Maura's desk are positioned along the outskirts. The single computer near the back of the room is assigned to Ira, a child with special needs. Two sets of bookshelves hold student materials--one a variety of games, art supplies, and math manipulatives, and the other a scant tradebook library.

One wall can be pushed back like an accordion to create a large double classroom with Barbara, the fifth grade teacher next door. Barbara and Maura

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

define themselves as a "team." They combine their classes for "class meetings" and share the teaching of social studies and science. Barbara teaches social studies to both groups, and Maura teaches science to both. Maura teaches reading and language arts to her own students, but math is homogeneously-grouped across all fifth grades; she teaches one 45-minute math class daily to the highest group. The five fifth grade teachers meet each Tuesday as a group for one hour of common planning time. Maura structures her plans in 45 minute time blocks, with reading, math and language arts taught in the morning, and science, social studies and silent reading in the afternoon. Most writing occurs during the "Language Arts" period and a daily 10-minute journal time.

There are 23 students in Maura's home room class, 9 girls and 14 boys. Four of the students are Native American. Seven students require Individual Educational Plans (IEP's). This is significantly more than in the other fifth grades, which have two or three "IEP kids". Freda is a full-time aide assigned to one student who has a history of violence. As long as her student remains calm, Freda works with other students.

Maura

"She looks just like my third grade teacher Mrs. Kearn!" I mused when I first saw Maura Lincoln. I hoped that she did not feel me staring at her during the moment when my thoughts connected her to the lady who taught me cursive writing 36 years ago. Their similarities exceeded the perfectly-styled hair and brunette features; Maura even carried herself in the same dignified and confident manner that I associated with Mrs. Kearn.

"And dedicated, too." I imagined. "Any teacher who would give up two such sunny and warm Vermont August days to voluntarily attend a state-sponsored workshop must be dedicated!" When the teachers talked

about why they came, however, "dedication" was only one reason--fear and worry were others.

Maura did not come alone to the workshop; all five fifth grade teachers from her school had made a "team decision to come to this and work on learning about portfolios together." The "team" had an unofficial leader; when Barbara spoke, Maura and the others often nodded in unison. Frustrated by the workshop leaders' initial focus on theory, Barbara exposed their fear. After the first hour, she blurted angrily

> We're in the dark. I am beginning to feel like we need to know it all right away. I am nervous. What do I need to know? For me this is a self-preservation issue!

Clearly, they had come to learn to do portfolios--and the workshop leaders responded to their concerns. The "team" left the workshop satisfied that they had learned how to get started by (1) collecting everything students write all year, (2) dating every piece of writing and (3) providing more opportunities to write. It was a beginning. From this point, there would be Network meetings offered to support teachers during the VAP process.

Two months later, I invited Maura to participate in this study. She was selected on the basis of her membership in the "curriculum-oriented" group of teachers, one of four belief clusters that emerged from pre-survey responses. The overall survey results indicate that teachers' orientations to instruction are related strongly to their attitudes about assessment in general and the VAP specifically. In very general terms, the clusters compare as shown here:

Name of Cluster	Summary of Beliefs
Curriculum-oriented(41%)	**--Parents and others need information that compares students. --VAP a poor match to instruction now.**
Process-Inquiry (19%)	--Children, parents and teachers should be equal participants in collecting and evaluating information. --VAP a good match to instruction now.
Polytheoretic (21%)	--Claimed multiple beliefs and often competing practices.
Uncertain (19%)	--Seem to hold no clear theoretical perspective on teaching and learning.

Maura's membership in the "curriculum oriented" cluster placed her among the largest group.

Like most of the "curriculum oriented" group, Maura is an experienced teacher. She holds a BA in English Literature and Masters degree in reading, and has taught for 20 years in a variety of settings. Her experience spans four different states, mostly in elementary classrooms, at nearly all grade levels. In addition, she has prepared high school students for equivalency tests and has been a teaching principal. For the past nine years, she has taught fifth grade at School #07; it the longest amount of time she has taught in one school. Maura's principal refers to her as "an outstanding teacher," and she is aware and proud of the respect she holds locally. When asked what enables her to teach the way she wants to, she responded demurely:

> I know I'm well thought of. I have a good reputation with the administration. I have good friends here.

Nothing New

Maura's pre-survey shows that she felt that she had "inadequate" knowledge about the VAP and that she was uncertain about whether the state's portfolio system would be a good match to her instruction. By the time of our first interview in November, she said that the writing instruction needed for implementing the VAP was "nothing new," and that it was the same writing process that she had been using for several years:

> I think that basically it is the same process. I always did brain-storming and the webbing and drawing from personal experiences and editing and spelling and rough drafts and final copies and presentations. I just didn't do it as "purpose, organization, details, voice and GUM"....so just different words, I guess.

With this footing in process writing, Maura had confidence from the beginning that she not only could accomplish the portfolio task, but that she could do it well. In the fall, she submitted a proposal to her Local Standards Board for recertification credit, offering to write a "Portfolio Guide" for teachers, based on the experience she would have teaching writing and assembling portfolios for the VAP her first year. She saw this as a way to share what she had learned with colleagues, so that other teachers could be better organized and not have to learn by "hit or miss," as she did.

Needing to Feel Organized

Although confident that she could "do" the VAP, she felt strongly that she needed more time to get organized and prepared for it. Most of all, she wanted and needed the state to provide her with a clear understanding of what was expected of her. She attended the summer workshop and all three network meetings, but she never really found the kind of starter kit she wanted there. She attended the network meetings in order to monitor

whether she was doing it right and to learn what her next step should be. Instead, she learned about using the rubric to score writing, which she felt was "putting the cart before the horse." Even after her portfolios were finished, she referred to it as a "hit or miss" process:

> I'm a very organized person, and if I don't have everything in my mind as to how I want to do it, when I want to do it, I can't get it done. So I really have to have an idea all planned out ahead of time before I begin in order to keep it all where it's supposed to be. And because this year we didn't really know where we were going or what we were doing, it was very hard for me...It's like hit or miss.

Throughout the year, her focus was on the end product. The VAP portfolios remained peripheral to writing instruction and assessment, as she searched for a way to manage and organize the creation of that product. She felt accountable for the end product, not the process of creating it, and exactly what the VAP wanted that product to look like remained frustratingly ambiguous throughout the year:

> The idea of being accountable to someone when I don't know what I'm going to be accountable for is some pressure I didn't have. It would have been nice if I could have a year to prepare and get ready. Then I'd be ready for it. Then I wouldn't have this pressure of ,"What do they want? What will it look like in the end?"

Teaching Writing

Perhaps Maura's greatest pressure came from her own desire to do a good job, without compromising her foremost goal for her students:

> I guess that my frustration is that I want to do well. I want my kids to do well. I want them to learn. My main goal is for them to learn and to have fun at the same time. I want to be sure that.. the assessment...does not stifle that.

This goal is manifested during their daily writing time. In Appendix A, I present a typical writing period in Maura's classroom. Over the year, I observed several; some looked somewhat different than this one. I saw students write in "cooperative" groups," and they wrote in other genre, especially expository text. Yet this description contains the salient features of writing in Maura's classroom. It is an "impressionist tale" (VanMaanen, 1988). In order to capture a "typical" writing period, I based this rendering on the details of one I observed, and also incorporated elements of typical teacher interaction with students during other writing periods.

My description of a writing period characterizes all of those I observed in many ways: (1) it does not extend beyond 45 minutes, (2) the students are assigned a topic--everybody is doing the same kind of writing, (3) there is no peer conferencing, (4) brief, positive feedback is given by Maura, and (5) all finished writing is carefully collected for the VAP portfolio.

"Teaching Writing Is Hard For Me"

Maura says that she likes to teach Language Arts, yet she finds teaching writing to be more difficult than teaching other subjects.

> It is harder for me to teach writing, because it is a slow process...I like the end result. It's just getting there that's the hard part.

What made the process feel slow? In the beginning of the year, she tried to teach numerous skills within each writing assignment:

> It's the rough drafts. I don't want to say that it's boring, but it drags, because in those, I'm trying to teach so much...While they're looking at sentence structure, they're looking at their detail sentences. Does it fit with their topic sentence? And then there's the editing at the end. I have to be careful that when we get to our first, second third, fourth and fifth drafts that they haven't lost the whole meaning of why we're doing it in the first place.

She was trying to keep the VAP criteria in mind, and to teach to it all at once. Consequently, she did not like her writing classes during the first two months of the year because she feared that the students' creativity was being stifled by so many rewrites. At the first network meeting, however, she learned that she did not need to teach all the criteria in each piece of student writing, and she began to focus students on getting their ideas on paper--on doing more writing. As a result, her students wrote more this year than in past years.

Maura also felt that her writing instruction was impacted by the unusually high number of students with special learning needs in her class.

> Writing is almost always hard because most of my IEP students are on for language--written language. It is always the same ones who can never get started, and it is because they have no idea how to attack the written language. And they need so much from you to get them started, and then so much feedback after that. And the others really suffer for it.

She said that she could not have peer conferences, although she had in previous years; this group of students could not handle it.

What, then, is the teacher's role in teaching writing to students who have difficulty writing? Maura feels that the answer lies in accepting how they can express themselves. (Those who are "not writers" may express themselves through art, for example.) For all students, the important thing is to accept whatever form of expression they use and to recognize student growth on an individual basis.

"I Never Criticize"

During the writing period described in Appendix A, Maura never criticizes what her students have written. Other than some final editing for mechanics, Maura does not mark on student papers and does not grade them. This fear of stifling creativity is rooted in her own experience learning to write as a child:

> I can remember as a student, writing a piece thinking it was great--the best piece I ever wrote..and taking it up there and then the nuns looking at it and saying, "RRRRRRRRR," and going back to my seat, thinking, "That's it! I'm not going to try again." I won't do it to my students.

This disposition is apparent in her approach to student writing. She circulates throughout the room, monitoring what her students are doing, responding to their questions, and encouraging them with feedback like, "Nice job,", "Good work; keep going," and "You're going right to town." She views this feedback to be facilitative and purposeful:

> I never criticize. Instead of criticism, it would be asking them questions. Where could you take this? Where is this going? What do you want the end to look like? I give them an avenue to go down, basically. Then they would try writing that way... then I would read it and I would either ask them more questions

or I would say, "That's great!"

In interactions with students about their writing, the language of the VAP criteria was never used during my observations, nor was the criteria in any way evident in the classroom environment. Although her students were writing more, there was little conversation about the process and content of their writing.

Portfolios

"I Save Every Little Scrap"

By January, the lavender folders in the crate behind Maura's desk were crammed full. Each one contained the same types of writing—science projects, book reports, stories, social studies reports, letters, poems. Students had written every day, and she had saved everything.

> They have their own ongoing writing folder, and I have a writing folder for their finished work...I save everything. All their rough drafts, all their brainstorming. See, before I would only save their finished product, but now since the state wants to see feedback, I don't know how much to save. So I save every little scrap and every little idea.

The students occasionally visited their writing collections. Approximately once each quarter, the students sorted through their writing to choose a "best piece" and to re-organize the folder. During these portfolio visits, they decided whether it was still the best piece, or if a new one should replace it. The current "best piece" was set aside in the left pocket of the folder.

Until May, everyone went through this same process at the same time...and they had plenty of writing from which to select "best" pieces, because Maura had saved everything.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"The Chosen Few"

> This is my way. It's not lack of confidence. I guess that this is the way I would have done it anyway, and I don't know if it's good enough for the VAP...I feel like I'm doing the best I can.

Maura said these words after the last of my eight visits to her classroom. I positioned my chair across from her as she sat at her desk. The pile of bulging lavender folders piled neatly in front of her had been transformed that day from unwieldy year-long collections of student writing to portfolios organized to meet the VAP's guidelines. She proudly invited me to look at them, as we discussed what had happened that day.

Five of Maura's students were chosen by the VAP, and they were referred to as "the chosen few." For two days she worked with them at a table in the front of the room during Language Arts time, while the other 18 students did other kinds of seatwork and Freda and another aide monitored them. She gave "the chosen few" the table of contents and explained it. Then they went through their collections and found their best piece. They looked at it, and decided whether it needed to be copied over, or whether they wanted to change it in any way. From there, they wrote a reflective letter stating why they had chosen it as their best piece. Maura observed that her students had difficulty writing their reasons for selecting a best piece:

> That was hard. I think maybe I would next year maybe every quarter, pick a best piece and ask them to write a letter. They needed more practice expressing their thoughts and being proud of themselves on paper.

After the letter was completed, the students sorted through their collections of writing for the final time and chose the other pieces called for by

the table of contents. There was no discussion about what makes a good piece of writing, or criteria for selection mentioned, except to "choose quality work." Whether or not Maura agreed with the students' choices for their portfolios, their choices were honored and she did not try to influence them.

On the second day, after the "chosen few" were nearly finished assembling their VAP portfolios, she asked the other students to assemble a similar portfolio. By then, these students knew that theirs had not been selected, yet she asked them to prepare a portfolio as if it were. Why?

> I do not like the idea of me working with those five, and all of a sudden saying, "Yours don't count!" So all of the others are going to do theirs, too. They are actually going to have a portfolio that could be sent to the state. That's what will go up to their sixth grade teacher. It's not right...all year long we saved that stuff, and we went through it as a team, but only a few would be chosen.

Maura realized afterward that she could have first asked the whole class to assemble portfolios, and then discreetly taken out the five to be sent to the state. But because she was concerned that the VAP portfolios be assembled exactly according to guidelines, that product became her immediate focus. She did not think of having the rest of the students create portfolios until after the "chose few" were finished.

Given Maura's concern about the management and organization required for creating the portfolio product, and that it served mainly as a repository for student writing, it is not surprising that she chose to put it together this way. Throughout the year, the state's portfolio was a collection folder, never central to classroom work as either an assessment or an instructional vehicle.

Making Sense of the Year

"Portfolio" means different things to different teachers. Some teachers focus on it as a product--a container for student work, and others focus on its use as a tool for teaching and learning (Valencia & Place, 1994). This case study suggests that the VAP portfolios had little influence in the classroom of this "curriculum oriented" teacher, other than to function as a product. The language of the criteria was never used with students, the scoring rubric was not incorporated, and Maura never changed her classroom writing and assessment processes. In fact, in the end, she again talked about her writing program as if it were a direct overlay of the VAP criteria:

> Drawing from experiences would be my **purpose**. The brain-storming and the webbing is the **organization** part. The **details** is paragraphing, which we teach in language in fifth grade. **Voice** was more vocabulary, as far as using words to describe things. And usually with words you can get your own **tone**, and then we always did the spelling and the **mechanics** and stuff anyway.

Yet, there <u>were</u> some significant changes in this classroom as a result of the VAP. Students wrote more often, they produced more writing, and they collected their writing. In addition, they selected "best pieces" from their collections on different occasions. Perhaps that is enough change for one year.

<u>"You Have To Do These Things"</u>

Maura negotiated her response to the mandate by first understanding the product. It was difficult at first:

> There's no question.. this comes down from the state. You **have** to do these things. So I guess at first there's always that little bit of

> intimidation and you don't know what you have to do or what is expected of you, and yet you're accountable. So at first a little bit of intimidation, a little bit of anger. You get over that.

In the end, however, Maura recognized that the experience of doing portfolios for the VAP was "very valuable" for both her and her students. She felt that collecting and selecting from their writing had a positive impact on the students.

> I realized that they were proud to look at all the work they had done this year and to think, "Wow, I did this," or "I remember doing this. We did this back when..."and then leafing through and looking at the dates to these things. They were very proud.

It Makes You Think

Maura talked about the impact that doing the VAP had on her teaching, and her future plans for incorporating the portfolio in her classroom. Although she termed it an "organization nightmare," she said that she liked it more than she disliked it for classroom use. She did not agree with the type of scoring and comparing of scores that was happening at the state level, but

> ...it does make you think about how you teach writing, the best way to teach writing to get the results you want. I think the state is doing a good thing.

In fact, once her VAP portfolios were completed and sent to the state, she said that next year she plans to teach the students to use the VAP scoring rubric to evaluate their own writing.

> Children need to know how to write, and I think starting with the rubric the way they have it, that's a good place to start. Now I see the reason. I see the need...I don't agree with the scoring; I

like the whole premise of it, though. Even if the state decided to do away with this type of assessment, I would carry through with the portfolio part anyway.

The extent to which Maura will "carry through with the portfolio part" minus the state mandate will be tested this year. The state notified fifth grade teachers this fall that fifth grade writing portfolios would not be collected for scoring this year, but would be in 1997. I spoke with Maura on the telephone last week and she told me enthusiastically, "I've given the kids the criteria, and they understood it. We use the rubric, and we read each other's writing. Come and read what they are doing! It's such exceptional work."

Clearly, there's more to come. The full influence of one year of implementing the VAP has not yet been realized in this classroom.

Appendix

Teaching Writing: A Typical Writing Period in Maura's Room

(January, 1995)

It is exactly 9:30 am.

Although there are no audible buzzers or bells, Mrs. Lincoln moves to the front of the classroom as if she hears one. The chalkboard behind her is clean except the date, a behavior chart, and a "Homework" list of four students' names who did not turn in homework that morning. A spurt of chattering and whispering voices resounds above the rub of desks being dragged over a carpet. Students push and pull their desks out of the three circles they had formed for reading groups forty-five minutes earlier. They scurry to arrange them in three double rows facing the chalkboard. Folding her arms, Mrs. Lincoln smiles and announces, " I need you to take out your writing folders."

Twenty three fifth grade students quietly place their paperback copies of Island of the Blue Dolphins inside their desks. Within a minute, desk tops are cleared, except for the plain manila folders. All eyes look up to their teacher in anticipation. It is time to listen to directions.

"First, let's talk about the 'Invention' paragraphs that you worked on in the computer lab yesterday. How many of you have it typed out? Do any of you still have it written by hand?" There is no pause between questions, and nearly all students half-raise their hands simultaneously. Mrs. Lincoln nods as if she understands to which question they are responding.

"OK. If it is done, you need to put it in your permanent folders. But if you want to today, you can either handwrite or type out a final copy." Mrs. Lincoln continues talking to her class in an evenly-paced voice as she crosses

the room to the full length window behind her desk. She picks up a blue plastic milk crate crammed with purple pocket folders in the back half and clusters of papers stuffed in the front half. "Anyone who has the 'Invention" paragraphs done, please bring them here," she says as she hoists the crate to the top of the long table and sits on the edge of the table next to it. "You need to take out all your rough drafts and final copies and staple your final copy on top. Make sure today's date, January 10, 1995, is on it." She points to the date written on the chalkboard behind her. "Find your purple folder in here and put your finished piece inside."

But the students do not need to find their purple folders nor staple their own papers. Instead, Mrs. Lincoln methodically removes individual folders from the crate and reads the name she printed in perfectly-formed block letters in the top right corner of each one: "Elizabeth, Steven,..." In response, each student brings papers to the table, gets them correctly-stapled, and deposits them into a lavender folder, while Mrs. Lincoln holds it open. As she closes each folder and places it back in the crate, she checks to see that the date is written on the final draft, then reads the name from the next folder. After all the students complete the procedure and return to their desks, she returns the crate to its place behind her desk and then returns to her position in front of the room. It is 9:43.

"For today's activity, we are starting a new story. This one is different. I gave you the 'Invention' topic for your last story. Today, I give you a picture. You can color it any way you want. Give it personality." She displays a xeroxed cartoon of a smiling space alien.

"That's so cute!" chimed Mary.

Mrs. Lincoln continues to give directions as she moves up and down the rows of desks and deliberately places a paper face down in the upper left

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

corner of each. "The next thing you will do is give it a name. Then write 10 words that describe the picture. Do you know what describe means?"

Susan raises her hand, "Yes...tell about it."

"That's right. After you list things about it, write a story. It can be any story you want. The list is your brainstorming part. It gives you things to write about." Mrs. Lincoln returns to the chalkboard and writes:

1. Color it.
2. Give it a name.
3. Write 10 words that describe it.
4. Write a story about it.

"This is something that you will do by yourselves. No talking. OK? Everybody can turn the paper over now and study it carefully." As students look at the cartoon, she places a sheet of white lined writing paper on each desk.

Within seconds, colored pencils, magic markers and crayons are drawn out from inside desks, and students are busy, silently coloring. Mrs. Lincoln walks from desk to desk, "Nice job," she says to Jimmy and is careful to compliment each student on their choices of colors as she looks over each shoulder.

After several minutes, Mrs. Lincoln speaks up. "It is 10 o'clock. If you are still coloring, put your crayons and markers away and start writing." Standing again in the front of the room, she visually scans the room to notice whether the transition from coloring to writing has started.

"But I'm not finished, Jon whispers to Sarah as he slowly returns his markers to their box.

Chris' hand shoots up. "I'm done!" Mrs. Lincoln walks to his desk and glances at his paper.

"Good for you, Chris. You are done...you have your ten words."

"Counting his name, I actually have eleven!" Chris beamed.

"All right. Now you are ready to begin your story. Study him a while, and maybe an idea will come to your head." While Chris looks blankly at his papers, she moves to Sarah's desk.

"This is right up your alley, isn't it Sarah?" Sarah loves art. "You are going right to town on your list...good for you!"

As Dennis' aide leaves the room, he raises his hand as if in crisis. "OOh! OOOh! Look!" Mrs. Lincoln walks briskly across the room. He hands her his list of words written in his aide's handwriting.

" Happy, kind, awesome, dirty, pizza, green hair, likes to play football, 98 years old, lives in a street in a cardboard box." Mrs. Lincoln reads it aloud.

"He goes to school, too!" Dennis added.

"Great idea! Put that down on your list."

"How do you spell 'school'?" he looks discouraged.

"Sound it out," she says encouragingly.

"C-H-O-L," he struggles.

"Very good, Dennis. Write it down."

Mrs. Lincoln notices that Mary and Elizabeth, who sit next to each other, are whispering. She positions herself behind them and looks over their shoulders. "Is there a problem here?"

"I can't think of any more words for my list," Elizabeth whines.

"Then go ahead and start your story. You might think of more as your write. Something might jump out at you," she reassures her. On her way back to the front of the room, she is careful to glance at each student's list. "Very good...nice job...keep going..good work..."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE